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Mike and Will are feeling sad, leaving it up to Eleven to try to figure out what is wrong.

Takes place roughly a year after Season 2.

The Matchmaker

"Mike?"

Mike Wheeler had been staring silently off at the Millennium Falcon toy model on the floor for nearly fifteen minutes, not recognizing El's presence at all except for the fact that their hands were interlocked as usual. The two of them were curled up together on the couch in the Wheeler basement, like any afternoon, but Mike seemed…different. When El tried to look at him, Mike's eyes seemed distant and sad and were fixated on the toy spaceship, but El could tell that he wasn't really looking at it. She knew that he was thinking about something else, and whatever that something was, it was troubling him.

Mike turned his head quickly, as if breaking out of a trance. "Huh?"

El squeezed his hand, giving him a concerned look. "Why are you sad?" she asked quietly, almost in a faint whisper.

"What?" Mike responded dumbly, blushing as he tried to avoid El's eye contact. "I'm…I'm not sad."

El quickly shot him *that* look. The "boyfriends don't lie" look, as she had heard Mike call it. Luckily for El, her boyfriend of a little over a year was horrible at lying, especially about his feelings, so whenever he did lie she was able to sniff it out almost immediately and give him a probing glare. Mike was the first one who told her that friends shouldn't lie, and she figured that because boyfriends are even more important than regular friends, boyfriends *especially* shouldn't lie. Thankfully for her, the "boyfriends don't lie" look hadn't failed her yet, and was immediately always followed by an apology and an explanation from Mike.

Mike glanced over at El's gaze and immediately blushed in embarrassment. "Sorry," he mumbled, sighing as El gave him a comforting smile, appeased. He let go of her hand and wrapped a warm arm around her shoulders. "I am sad…" he admitted, looking back over at the toy Falcon, "it might be nothing, but…I feel like Will's avoiding me."

El furrowed her brow, leaning against her boyfriend. “Why?”

Mike sighed again. He did that a lot when he was sad, El noticed. “I don’t know…it’s just, we used to hang out so much. He’s my best friend,” Mike explained. “The only other person I spend more time with than him is you. But now it’s like we aren’t even communicating anymore. I tried to invite him over here a few times a week ago, and he kept giving me excuses that he was busy but I *know* he’s been having sleepovers with Dustin and Lucas because they’ve told me. And now he’ll barely even talk to me! This week I tried talking to him in between classes and he was just giving me one-word responses.” Mike took a deep breath after his long rant, looking over at El glumly. “I…I’m worried that I’m losing him, not just as a best friend…but as a friend, too,” he finished.

El felt a pang in her chest. Ever since they had pulled out the fake dead body of the boy from the quarry a little over two years ago, she was able to tell how much Will meant to Mike. The two had practically become inseparable since Will was saved from both the Upside Down and the Mind Flayer, so El knew how it must feel for Mike to entertain the idea that he might be losing the young Byers boy once again.

“You think…something’s wrong? Like before?” El asked, and no further explanation was needed. Whenever she referenced events that happened “before,” it always pertained to the Upside Down, or the Lab, or the hodgepodge of supernatural events that happened in the period between 1983 and 1984.

Mike shook his head. “No. I mean, maybe, but I don’t think so, because if that were true then he would be avoiding everyone, but he’s still talking with Lucas, Dustin, and even Max. It’s just me,” Mike said, sighing. “And I have no idea why. I can’t know what to apologize for if I don’t know what I did wrong.”

El rested her head against Mike, pondering what he had just told her. She didn’t know exactly what was going on between Mike and Will, but she also knew that she didn’t like seeing Mike sad. She would have to do something.

“I will ask him,” El said finally. “If you did anything wrong. And if he

is avoiding you."

Mike turned his head over to meet her, a troubled expression on his face. "El, I dunno…maybe it would be best if we—"

"I *will* talk with Will," El said matter-of-factly, loudly interrupting him before he could finish. Mike promptly closed his mouth. The way she had said it was so authoritative that Mike was too shocked to say anything else in response. El realized that she might have come off as too harsh, and her expression softened. "I want you to be happy and not worry," she said.

Mike gave her a smile of understanding, but it wasn't the type of smile that she liked him giving her. It wasn't the same smile he gave her when he was busy giggling from excitement at seeing the new Ghostbusters movie or when he told her she was looking pretty today. It was a sad smile; the type he gave her when he wanted to tell her everything was okay when it wasn't.

"I love you," Mike said, leaning down to give her a soft kiss on the lips.

"Love you, too," El said softly, kissing him back briefly before nuzzling into his body. She *would* make her boyfriend happy again.

El had figured that she would be the best person to talk to Will about this, primarily because she viewed him as her soon-to-be brother. Sure, Hopper wasn't engaged to Joyce…yet. But the two had recently started dating, and with the way she had noticed the two of them looking at each other, she knew it was only a matter of time before she and Hopper moved in with the Byers. Joyce was always very nice to her all the time, and so she would be more than okay with her being her Mama once Hopper finally married her.

El had always liked Will; that was mostly because Mike, Lucas, and

Dustin were friends with Will, but it was also more than that. She knew Will was different, like her. Well, not exactly like her, because as far as she was concerned he didn't have powers, but he had been through something so traumatic and damaging that practically no one was able to relate to him. And while El couldn't relate in the slightest to being possessed by a demon and spending such a long time in that scary, dark place, she could relate to the feeling of being different.

Will knew that too, at least El thought so. So, whenever she and Hopper came over to the Byers' house for dinner, she would love to spend time with him, drawing and playing video games on his Atari and doing whatever he was most comfortable with. They had gotten to know each other and bond over the past year since she came back into the party's lives for good and Will no longer had to worry about the Upside Down. She wasn't as close with him as Mike, but they were close. She liked Will. And El knew that when Hopper and Joyce got married, he would make a good brother.

Admittedly, El didn't know Jonathan too well. But Will said he was nice, and he was dating Mike's sister who is also nice. So, she would be willing to give her soon-to-be older brother a chance, too.

But that wasn't what was important right now. What was most important was getting answers out of Will.

The night after Mike told her about him and Will not talking anymore, it just so happened that Hopper and Joyce were having a date. Oftentimes, when Hopper drove to the Byers' home to pick Joyce up, he would drop El off when he knew Will would be home just so she wasn't lonely while he was gone. Thankfully, this was one of those nights.

After being warmly greeted by a well-dressed Joyce Byers who had hugged her and then rushed outside, El walked through the small house, making her way to Will's room where she gave a small knock on the door.

Will opened it immediately, smiling at her. "H-hey El!" he greeted, opening it wide enough for her to come in.

“Hi Will,” El said, smiling at him shyly. She walked into his room and sat down on his bed as Will walked behind her. “How…how are you?” she asked. Mike had told her that it was polite to start conversations that way after saying hello to people, and even though El didn’t really understand why, she knew that she should at least start the conversation this way.

Will paused, avoiding El’s eye contact. “Um…I’m okay,” he said quickly as he fidgeted with his hands. Like Mike, that’s what he did when he was nervous. They had a lot of the same nervous ticks, although others were different. Will blushed less than Mike, for one. Although he still did blush. Will also talked much less when he was nervous, whereas Mike was often prone to rambling. Like now, where Will was barely saying a word to her.

“Will,” she prompted, causing her potential sibling to whip his head up to look at her. She wanted answers, and she supposed the best way to get them was to just ask. “Do you not like Mike anymore?” El asked, direct and to-the-point.

His eyes widened and he just about nearly gasped. The question had obviously caught him off guard. “No! I l…of course I like Mike!” Will said quickly, with a little bit of a horrified expression on his face. He sat down next to her on the bed. “W-why?”

“Mike’s…sad,” El tried to explain. She’s been getting better with words, although it was still hard for her. “Says you don’t talk to him anymore…or want to hang out. He thinks you don’t want to be friends anymore.”

Will looked at her with a sad face, but with a little bit more understanding than before. “Oh…I’m really sorry, El. I’d never want Mike to feel like that, especially because of me. I do want to be friends with him, and I want to talk to him and hang out with him again, but…” he trailed off, sighing. “It might just be easier for everyone if I stay away from Mike.”

“No, that’s not true,” El said with a furrowed brow. “Mike wants to be friends with you, you want to be friends too, if you spend time together that will make you both happy. Right?”

Will shuddered. He obviously regretted saying that last part. “It’s… it’s complicated.”

El didn’t really understand what was so complicated about that, but she nodded anyway, pretending to understand. “Do you want to talk about it?” she asked, scooting closer.

“No…I mean, yes, but…I can’t,” Will struggled to say. “I’m worried that you might hate me if I tell you.”

Now Will really wasn’t making any sense, and El couldn’t even pretend to comprehend what he was on about. How could she hate someone who was supposed to be her future brother? Emphatically, she reached over and put a firm hand on his shoulder, looking him in the eye. “I won’t,” she insisted, holding up her pinky at eye-level with Will. Mike had taught her that it was a way to make an extra-special promise. “Pinky promise,” she stated, giving him a small, reassuring smile.

Letting go of his initial shock, Will gave her a teary-eyed smile and nodded, sniffling as he lifted his hand up to wrap his slightly-larger pinky around her small one. They remained like that, pinkies interlocked, for a little bit until Will let out a shaky breath, moving his hand down as he gripped his knees. El looked at him worriedly until he finally spoke.

“El, I…I’m gay.”

Pause. El noticed silent tears falling down his cheeks. “How can you be gay if you are crying?” she asked slowly, still not fully understanding. She had only heard the word once before, but it was very strange for him to use that word in this context.

Will sniffed again, turning to look at her with confusion. “Huh?”

“You said you’re gay, which I read in one of my books means really happy…so why are you crying if you’re happy?”

Will let out a startled laugh, causing El to be only more confused. “No, I mean, that’s one definition,” he said, wiping his face with his sleeve, “but it also means, like, queer, or whatever you want to call

it. As in…I like boys. Romantically," he added awkwardly.

"Oh," El said, finally understanding what he was talking about. She smiled at him, hoping to set any fears of her hating him aside. "Will, it's okay. I'm gay too."

Will laughed a little again. At least he wasn't crying, but El still cocked her head to the side. "No, El…it's normal for you to like boys like that. It doesn't make you gay," he said, and then the admiring smile he had on faded to a self-conscious frown. "It's…it's only when you're a boy and you like other boys. I'm supposed to like girls that way, but I don't. That's not normal for people. *I'm* not normal. It's wrong for me to be like this, and it would be wrong for me to have a boyfriend like you have a boyfriend."

"Why? Who says it's wrong?" El asked, genuinely not knowing the answer. What made it wrong for Will to like boys? Was *she* wrong for liking boys, too?

"I dunno…everyone, I guess?" Will said, although in El's opinion he seemed kind of unsure himself. "People would just treat me differently if they knew I was, um, gay. Some bullies at school have already figured it out just by looking at me, and they're already giving me shit for it."

"Mouthbreathers," El muttered menacingly to herself, scowling at the thought of anyone hurting Will. She knew their type for sure, always mean-spirited people who wanted to bring down anyone they considered to be not normal. They were at the lab, and she knew that they were at school from all of the stories Mike, Will, and the others had told her. "They're stupid. Just because you're different doesn't mean you're wrong."

Will glanced over at her. "It's just complicated, El…" he muttered, still not entirely convinced. El reached over and grabbed his knee.

"Is it wrong for me to use my mind powers? Just because it's different?" she challenged him, knowing that Will and the others thought her telekinetic abilities were too cool to be considered "wrong." Mike had told her so, so many times in so many different ways. To further prove her point, El looked over at his nightstand to

the box of tissues and, glaring at the box, moved it towards her, taking one out and using the paper cloth to dab at the tears on Will's face.

Will shakily laughed as he shook his head and let her wipe away his tears. "Of course not…" he said softly, looking over at El.

"Then it isn't wrong for you to have a boyfriend," she insisted as she crumpled the tissue and threw it to the side, grabbing another one to wipe her bloody nose. Smiling, Will looked at her with a mixture of amazement, relief, and appreciation, almost as if the idea of accepting this part of himself was foreign to him.

"Thanks, El," Will said gratefully, grabbing her hand and squeezing it gently. Although it was a different type of squeeze than the romantic type she was used to from Mike, it felt nice nonetheless and she squeezed back reassuringly. She could understand why Will was scared of telling her, at least somewhat, because of his experiences with bullies. But one thing still escaped her.

"Will…what does this have to do with you staying away from Mike?" she asked hesitantly.

Will froze, and El knew that this question might scare him more than any of the previous ones she had asked. "I…I'm sorry, I really can't tell you that." El gave him a sideways glare, similar to the "boyfriends don't lie" look that she used on Mike. Maybe she would call this one the "future brothers don't keep secrets from their future siblings" look, although it would remain to be seen whether this had the same effect on Will as it did on Mike. From the looks of things, it appeared to at least make him falter. "El, please, I guarantee you, you *will* hate me for this…"

"Already pinky promised. Remember?" El said, rolling her eyes and holding up her pinky. Will tried to give her a smile but he couldn't. "I won't hate you. Please tell me? I don't like seeing you sad and not… gay."

Will sighed, smiling gently at her before speaking. "Okay, but I…I get it if you hate me anyway. I get it," he started to say, only to earn another glare from El. "Okay, okay!" he said defensively before

shakily fidgeting with his hands, avoiding eye contact with her.

“I like Mike …and it’s the same way you like Mike.”

El remained silent for a minute, slowly looking over and analyzing Will. She knew she should probably act a little more surprised, but for some reason a part of her felt like she had somehow known this already. Every now and then, she had been catching glimpses of him looking at Mike in awe and adoration, similarly to El whenever she looked at Mike. She never put two and two together until now, but with the admission, she supposed that it didn’t catch her too off guard. Will, however, was still acting weird and wasn’t even looking at her, almost as if he were ashamed to be telling her this. El furrowed her brow and continued staring at him. Did Will seriously think that she would hate him for something like this? After he didn’t elaborate more, she decided to break the silence that had formed between them.

“You like Mike, like a boyfriend? Same as me?” she asked, confirming. She already knew the answer; at the very least, Will had been pretty straightforward.

Will’s bottom lip quivered as he meekly gave her a faint nod. It seemed like all that he was capable of doing.

El sighed. “Will…why would I hate you for that?” she asked him. She wasn’t angry at him for liking Mike, or for keeping it a secret from her; she was frustrated at the notion that his soon-to-be sister would hate him for something like that, or anything for that matter.

Will slowly turned his head, peeling his eyes up from the ground in order to look at her. “W-why wouldn’t you? El, he’s your boyfriend,” Will said quietly, almost whispering to her yet only giving El information that she already knew very well.

“Yes, I know…” she said patiently before continuing, “…but Mike is my favorite thing to talk about. If you told me you felt the same way about him when we first met, then we could have talked about him together more often,” El gave him a perplexed smile. “Why would making me talk more about my amazing boyfriend make me hate you?” She wasn’t really sure why Will was acting so weird about this

as he gave her a dumbfounded look.

Will, for his credit, seemed to be a little less on edge, but still very weary of her reaction. “El, I’m not sure you understand…I like Mike the same way that you like him,” Will tried to explain slowly as El observed him calmly, nodding. Will’s bafflement only increased. “Shouldn’t you be jealous?”

“Why?” El asked, still a little confused.

“Because…because I want him to be my boyfriend, too!” Will sputtered, turning red in the face immediately after he said it. From El’s perspective, he seemed awfully embarrassed as he bit his bottom lip and stared back at the ground. “…I mean, it’s not like that would ever happen, I’m just saying…”

“Will, why are you acting so strange?” El asked, placing a gentle hand on his arm. “I understand. You want to date Mike, like me. It would be different if you were someone I didn’t know, but you are going to be my future brother, and I trust you.” She paused, as if thinking over the idea and making a decision about it within the span of a few seconds. “I am okay with it. If you want to date Mike, too. He can be both your boyfriend and mine.”

Will’s jaw practically dropped as he whipped his head to stare at the soft-spoken girl, wide-eyed. “El…I can’t—”

El sighed dramatically, cutting him off and placing a hand over his mouth to shut him up. “Will. You will just keep saying stupid stuff to make it not okay. I am going to ask you questions, and you will answer yes or no by nodding and shaking your head,” she said slowly, hoping that she was being both forceful and sensitive enough. “Understand?”

Hesitating, Will nodded. Good.

“Does Mike make you happy?” she asked, already knowing the answer. Although she thought that she would know the answer to most of these questions.

Will nodded.

“Mike makes me happy too,” she said, smiling a little bit at the thought of Mike again. But she knew she had to refocus again in order to keep on getting answers from Will. “Does my relationship with him bother you?”

Will furrowed his brow and quickly shook his head. “El, I would never get in the way of you and Mi—”

El reached over quickly to clamp her hand over Will’s mouth. The head shake was all that she had needed. “Good,” she said, smiling to let him know that it was alright. “Do you want to be in a relationship with him, too?”

Blushing, and a little flustered, Will nodded.

“So, Mike makes you happy, you want to date him, and me dating him doesn’t bother you…” El listed off, looking over at Will. “What’s wrong with you and me dating Mike at the same time?”

Will was still staring at El, although this time with a different expression on his face. Tears were springing up in his eyes again and, before lunging over at her and giving her a big hug, taking her completely off guard. Neither of them were particularly known for physical intimacy; in fact, out of everyone in the party they were the most likely to shy away from it (well, except El with Mike…and Will with Mike, now that she thought about it). But although the hug was quite a shock, El was quick to reciprocate it, and was comfortable with it. It was definitely different than the hugs Mike gave her, which had more passion and kissing with them too; Will’s hugs were warm and comforting, and as she held onto the tiny boy who was not much bigger than herself she knew that things for him were going to be alright.

“Y-you’re seriously amazing, El…” Will muttered, sniffling as a few tears rolled down his cheeks as he clung onto her. “I thought you were gonna never want to speak to me again, or at least just tell me to stay away from Mike, but definitely not…this.”

“Told you. I’d never hate you,” El said, pulling away a little bit to give him a smile. “I trust you. You’re my future brother, and you make Mike happy. And I want you to be happy, too. We can share

him, and he can be your boyfriend."

Will gave her a sly smile as he looked at her with red, puffy eyes, chuckling. "El, you're a great future sister, and while that sounds nice…" he trailed off, once again looking away from her. Why did he keep doing that? "Look, all I'm saying is I doubt Mike is…like me."

El waited for him to clarify, and when he didn't she was able to pick up the pieces. "…you don't think that he's gay," she said, and as soon as the words came out of her mouth they sounded rather silly.

Will glanced over at her. "Well, I know he's not *gay*…he loves you. That's clear as day," he said, smiling. "But…I mean, I've heard of people liking both boys and girls before, but I don't know for sure that's a thing and I don't know if Mike's like that." He paused. "And…even if he did, I doubt he'd feel that way about…me."

El sighed, rolling her eyes. Even though she wasn't entirely sure about both of those things either, she couldn't help but marvel at Will's obliviousness. Did he really not see what she saw? Will was one of the most important people in Mike's life; El knew this firsthand. At the very least, she figured there was a much greater chance that Mike liked Will back than Will thought.

"I can ask him, if you want," she suggested, although it was more of a statement of purpose. She was definitely already planning on talking with Mike about why Will was avoiding him, so she might as well just ask him whether he wanted Will to be his boyfriend, too.

Will seemed to take this statement with significantly less calmness. "El, no. You can't tell him, you just can't," he said fearfully, eyes wide and pleading. "Please, it could change everything between us. Promise me, promise you won't tell him."

El looked over at him guiltily. She didn't want to hide anything to Mike, particularly after that year of hiding the fact that she was alive and well from him, but she also realized that this was something deeply personal and special to Will and she didn't have a right to tell it to her boyfriend for him.

"Okay…" she said, sighing. "Promise." Will breathed a sigh of relief

as El thought it over again. Her original goal was to stop Mike from being sad, but now that she knew Will was hurting too, she knew she had to make it right. After so much pain and hardship, for all of them, they all deserved to be happy. “I will ask him anyway. Deh-secret-ly,” she said, saying the last word slowly. She had only heard it the other day, but she was pretty sure what it meant.

Will furrowed his brow. “Um…you mean, discreetly?”

El beamed. “Yes, that’s the word! Ask him, without telling him about you.”

Will still seemed to look uncertain, but he didn’t seem to be entirely opposed to the idea. “…and how are you gonna do that?”

“I will figure it out,” El said, grinning as she reached for Will’s hand, squeezing it platonically. “Trust me, Will. Discreetly.” Will smiled, squeezing her hand back.

The next day, El was with Mike in his room upstairs, lying on her stomach on his cozy bed next to him as he sat up against the wall. Mike was busy talking about something; maybe it was Star Wars, or Ghostbusters, or the Hobbit, but whatever it was El was only pretending to pay attention. She had enough on her mind, and most importantly she was trying to figure out a way to talk to him discreetly about his potential feelings for Will, without giving away Will’s secret. She found this very hard: should she try to ease into the topic? That is what Will had suggested, although she wasn’t exactly sure how to do that. Maybe she could bring up the idea of liking multiple people at one time, and see where that led her? Or—

“El?” It was Mike. Apparently, she was being too quiet. Well, she was always quiet, but she might have been even quieter than usual. She was too busy concentrating. “You okay?” El lifted her head up to look

at him.

“Do you like Will?” She asked him, the words slipping out of her mouth before she had the chance to stop them. Well, she supposed that she was just going to “jump in with both feet”, as Hopper liked to say.

Mike jumped a little bit himself, and it almost looked as if he had been kissed by a demodog. He quickly tried to drown out his shock with words. “W-what?? N-no, I, I mean, yes, yeah, of course,” Mike babbled, stuttering in his speech, “y-yeah, he’s my best friend, I’ve known Will since, like forever, so of course I like him. That’s why I was so worried the other day about us growing apart, b-because of course, yeah, duh, I like him.”

El, at this point was used to his nervous ramblings, so she simply waved it away. He had not answered the question she had in mind. “I didn’t mean like that. I know Will is your friend,” she said, moving her body up to lean against the wall next to Mike, “what I’m asking is, do you like him…more than friend?”

Mike’s lower lip trembled as his body began to shake. El realized he was scared, like Will was when he told her about him, and she tried to grab his hands to steady him. Mike shuddered, and when El tried to get a better look at his face, she saw there were tears in his eyes. She immediately felt a pang of guilt. Maybe Will was right when he told her to “ease into it”; this wasn’t how she wanted it to be going at all.

“El,” Mike said, sniffling as he turned his face to meet hers, their bodies only inches apart. “I love *you*,” he said emphatically, squeezing her hands tightly. As if they were the only lifeline he had right now. “I *love* you, El.”

El couldn’t help but smile. She leaned in to give him an adoring, soothing kiss that lasted only a couple of seconds. “I know. I love you too, Mike,” she said as she pulled away, causing Mike to give her a teary smile. At least that had calmed him down a bit: that reaffirmation of their love had always calmed her down in moments of pain, anyway. “It’s okay, Mike. Just tell me the truth? I love you, Mike, always. I promise.”

Mike exhaled sharply, still tightly holding El's hands as he didn't turn away from her. "O-okay…okay…" he breathed heavily as El watched him like a nurturing hawk, knowing that if he broke down during this she would need to swoop in and give him as many hugs, kisses, and I-love-you's as she possibly could to make him feel better. She knew that this was necessary, though, to make all of them happy again. She needed to know. Mike took a deep breath in before continuing.

"I…I do like Will," Mike let out, sighing deeply as the words left his mouth. "M-more than a friend. I'm s-sorry for not t-telling you sooner. I only realized it after everything with the Mind Flayer…b-but I think I've liked him a lot even b-before then, t-too," he continued, his voice cracking every so often as more tears stung his eyes. Now that the truth was out of him, it was escaping him like helium from a hole in a balloon, and El certainly didn't want to stop him any time soon. "I-I don't know what it is, b-because I love you, and I know I love you, b-but I've always felt attracted to b-both girls and boys…a-and I'm too scared to talk about it, y-you're the first person I've ever told." Mike tried to wipe some of the tears out of his eyes. "El, I'm sorry. I wish I didn't feel like this. I don't know what's wrong with me…"

Now, that last part El couldn't tolerate at all. "Mike, you are *not* wrong," she said firmly, causing his eyes to spring back open to look at her. "You are the best person I have ever met. You are the best and most perfect boyfriend ever, and this does not change that at all. Nothing is wrong with you, Michael Wheeler. To me, everything is *right* with you."

Mike looked shyly at El, although the hint of a smile was tugging at his lips. "Really?"

El paused to consider. "Well, maybe not *everything*," she admitted, tapping her forehead to think. "You sometimes won't cuddle me at home because you're too scared Hop will see you, even when he's not there. And you once wiped a booger away from under my nose, which was super gross," El said with a sly smirk, causing Mike to chuckle.

"I told you, I thought it was from the soup we were eating!" Mike shot back defensively. "That was a chunky soup!" El laughed.

“Still gross. But you’re still perfect, to me. You put up with me when I want to call you in the middle of the night after my nightmares, you let me sit on the back of your bike when riding me places…” she paused, realizing just how difficult it was to put her love and adoration of the boy right next to her. “And, you make me feel special. And happy. I love you, Mike, nothing would change that.”

Mike grinned back in response, letting go of her hands and wrapping his arms around the girl. El didn’t think she was very good with words, but she knew she had said the right things just then. “El, I love you. And even though I might not be perfect, you definitely are,” he said as El rolled her eyes lightheartedly. “I’m serious! I couldn’t ask for a better girlfriend. You are so, so amazing and I wouldn’t give you up for the world.” He paused, his smile faltering ever-so-slightly, but just enough for El to take notice. “I’ll get over Will, I promise. You don’t have to worry about it.”

El furrowed her brow up at him as she snuggled into his warm body, noting the guilty tone that he ended on. “Worry?” she asked, puzzled. “Why would I worry?”

Mike returned her puzzled expression, as if the answer would be obvious. “Well, that’s why you asked, right? You were worried that I would leave you for Will. I’m saying that won’t happen. I’d never want to hurt you like that. I know I shouldn’t be feeling this way, and I’ll get over it. I’m happy with *you*.”

“Okay…” El said, trying to follow his train of thought. Of course, she would have been sad if he wanted to leave her for Will, but she hadn’t even considered that as a possibility. Not to mention he had gotten quite a few things wrong, or simply overlooked other factors. “But…wouldn’t you be more happy with Will, too?”

“El, what are you saying?” Mike said, fear suddenly returning to him. He pulled back from a little bit. “Do…do you want to break up with me?”

“No!” El said loudly, horrified that the thought could even cross his mind. He obviously wasn’t following her. “Mike, I still want to be your girlfriend. I still would. But…if you like Will too, maybe he can be your boyfriend too? You can date us both. Then everyone would

be happy."

"W-what?" Mike stuttered, looking at her confused. He sighed. "El, that's…um, relationships aren't supposed to work like that."

"Why not?" El asked, genuinely not knowing. If all he gave her were excuses like Will had, though, then she would most certainly set him straight. She didn't see what was wrong with it, at least.

"Well, for starters, guys aren't supposed to, um, date guys," Mike said, trying to find the right words. He had likely never explained this before, so El was trying her best to be patient even then she knew he was wrong. "It's, uh, y'know, frowned upon. My family's really religious and it, like, goes against God's teachings to be gay, or whatever I'm supposed to be."

"God says it's not okay?" El asked, tilting her head to the side. She hadn't learned much about religion at all; Hopper was not exactly a religious man, and it's not like she would have learned anything about it in the Lab. "Well, then God's a mouthbreather."

"El!" Mike gawked at her, almost like he had accidentally choked on his own spit. He was at a complete loss for words.

"If God doesn't want people to be happy, or gay, then why is he worth praying to?" El reasoned, and rationally so, she thought.

Mike shrugged nervously. "Um, it's not that simple, but I guess you're right…" Mike admitted, sighing. "Look, the thing is, I'm not sure I even believe in a God. But my parents do. And they believe homosexuality…" Mike paused when he noticed El's blank expression, "…or, being gay, is like one of the worst sins imaginable. They like traditional, boy-girl relationships like you and me…not untraditional ones. If they ever found out that I wasn't a perfect, traditional son, they might…" he trailed off, his face paling. "I-I'm not sure what they'd do."

El nodded, understanding. Unlike Joyce, who El knew was a perfect mother just from the fact that she had rescued her child from the Upside Down of all places without a second thought of her own wellbeing, El didn't know Mike's parents all that well. From the little

time she had spent with them, they seemed somewhat…uninterested in Mike and his friends. They also seemed rather traditional and closeminded. She wasn't sure how they would react if they found out Mike was dating another boy, especially after hearing about the stigma surrounding it from Will. Joyce would never turn her back on her boy; Karen and Ted Wheeler, on the other hand, El wasn't so sure.

But then, a thought occurred to her. "Traditional." El repeated, furrowing her brow again. "You said, we were 'traditional'." She turned to look at Mike. "Am I a 'traditional' girlfriend?" she asked.

Mike blanched. "I, uh, I mean…you're a girl. I-in their eyes, yeah, you are traditional, I guess."

El raised her eyebrow, concentrating on a book lying across the room on Mike's desk. "Can traditional girlfriends do this?" Glaring at the book, it moved a little bit and suddenly shot at them. El held out her hands to grab the book and show it to Mike. She didn't like to admit it, but she had grown to love showing off her powers every now and then.

"No…"

"And if your parents knew…would they like you dating me?"

Mike sighed. "My dad would probably call me unpatriotic for dating someone he thinks is a Russian spy, and my mom…yeah, no. Definitely not," he admitted.

"So why do you date me? Your parents would disapprove, if they knew about me."

Mike's eyes widened with incredulity. "B-because I love you!" he said, as if it was obvious.

El grinned: not only because she liked to get him to say that, but he had also walked right into her trap. "Then why don't you date Will?" she asked, smiling at him victoriously.

Mike blushed. "Umm, I think it's, like, a little bit of a different situation, El…" he said, although she knew he saw that she had a

point.

“Why different?”

“El, it’s not just me and him…I’m already dating you, and I don’t want to stop dating you!” Mike said insistently. El rolled her eyes. She thought she had already gone over this. “Th-there’s a reason it’s called a ‘couple’ and not a ‘triple’, or whatever…relationships are just meant to be two people.”

El groaned. “People are not meant to have powers,” she shot back. She obviously knew that most relationships portrayed in the soap operas she watched and the books she read were just two people, a boy and a girl, but she didn’t understand why it had to be *limited* to just that. “We can be different.”

“But…wouldn’t you be jealous?” Mike asked questioningly. “What about Max?” About a week after she had come back, out of guilt, El had told him about her not liking Max at first and even how she had tripped her off her skateboard when she saw her with Mike in the gym. In Mike’s mind, he had probably thought she was jealous of her. Although in her mind, these two situations weren’t comparable.

El shook her head. “Different,” she insisted. “Thought Max was replacing me. Now I know that’s not true. Will wouldn’t be replacing me, you’d just have both him and me. And I didn’t know Max then, but I know Will now. I trust him.”

Mike sighed. “L-look El, I just don’t know…” he said reluctantly, although she could tell that she was winning him over. “People here are, like, *really* judgmental, a-and if other people saw I was dating more than one person at the same time, especially if one of those people were a boy like Will is, they’d be weird about it because that’s not how it’s supposed to work and—”

“Mike.” El interrupted him, placing a finger to his lips and effectively silencing him. “You told me you liked Will. Explain why.”

Mike blushed furiously again, trying to shrug his shoulders. “I-I mean, what’s there to explain? He’s a smart, kind, we like all of the same comic books and movies, he has a good taste in music, and he’s

a badass artist." He paused, sighing. "But, I like him, because…I mean, it's kind of like the same reasons I liked you at first, but different. I like his smile. Ever since we were little, I've always tried to make him smile, because it looks so…beautiful," he said, smiling to himself. "And his laugh, too. He doesn't laugh often, or sometimes he pretends to laugh to try to fool people. But when he laughs, like, actually laughs, it's like the greatest music I've ever heard." Mike paused, looking embarrassed. "Sorry…I've been talking for a while, haven't I?"

El smiled kindly at him, grabbing his cheek and pressing her forehead against his. "Mike…I want you to be happy. Will makes you happy," she insisted, and Mike bashfully nodded against her. "If a person makes you this happy, why would I not be okay with you dating him? And why would you care about what other people think about that?"

Mike let out a shaky breath. "I-I'm just scared…" he whispered. "What if…what if he doesn't feel the same way? What if it's too weird for him?" El desperately wanted to tell him that she knew the answer to both of his questions, and that his worries were stupid, but she had promised Will that she wouldn't tell him. So, El shrugged, trying to feign ignorance.

"Maybe, you can ask him?" she suggested, knowing that the only way this romantic drama between them would end would be if they just talked to each other.

Mike froze at her suggestion. "B-but what if he says no?" Mike asked fearfully, and El restrained the urge to snort. "And besides, it doesn't really matter…we still haven't talked in over a week."

Oh, right. Was that how this whole thing started? El had honestly forgotten. But now that she knew what was really going on, she figured it was time to be proactive. Standing up, she walked across the room and grabbed Mike's Supercom. She had seen Mike use it so many times to call his friends that she figured she would be able to use it. She paused, though.

"Can I call him?" El asked, knowing that it would be the polite thing to do. This was his future relationship, after all. Hesitantly, Mike

nodded. After Mike helped her get it to the right channel, she pressed the button. “Will?” she said into it, looking at Mike for guidance. “This is El. Do you…copy?” she asked, repeating the phrase she had heard Mike say multiple times. He smiled at her, almost proudly, but mouthed one word to her insistently. “Over,” she said quickly. Mike practically beamed.

There was a tense pause as both of them waited to see if Will had heard them. After a moment, static filled the line. “Hi El,” Will responded, and El and Mike smiled at each other. “I copy. What’s up? Over.”

“Hi Will! I am with Mike,” she said as she held onto the button. “Do you want to…hang out?” she asked, the words coming unnaturally to her. She never really spoke like that, but she figured it was the best way of conveying what she wanted. “With us. Over,” she added quickly.

Another pause. “Okay,” Will said, the line crackling over the Supercom. “Sure. Can you guys come over to me? Mom still doesn’t like me going out on my own. I’m just at my house. Over.”

El grinned. “Yes. We’ll be over soon. Bye Will. Over,” she looked over at Mike before adding, “…and out.” She lowered the antenna on the Supercom, grinning over at Mike proudly. Mike looked at her astounded.

“How did you do that? I’ve been trying to get Will to hang out with me for weeks!” he sputtered, baffled.

“Well, we’re going to hang out with him now,” El said matter-of-factly, putting the device down as she got up. “Come on, Mike. Let’s go see my future brother…and your future boyfriend.”

Mike was very quiet on the bike ride over to Will’s house. Tense, too.

El could tell because she had her arms wrapped around him as she sat on the edge of the bike, and he was still tense. He was nervous, she could tell, but it was much different from the nervous Mike she was used to. Nervous Mike talked…a lot. This nervous Mike wasn't saying anything. Even as they approached the Byers' household, he wasn't talking to her at all.

"Mike," she said, getting his attention as the bike stopped. He turned his head around, putting his feet squarely on the ground. "Are you okay?"

Mike looked like he was about to respond with an easy lie, but he stopped himself, letting out a shaky breath. "I'm scared," he admitted.

El got off the bike, biting her lip. "You don't have to tell him anything, if you don't want to," she told him, even though she knew he had no reason to be scared and that it would all be fine. But Mike didn't know that. And she didn't want to pressure him into doing anything he didn't want to do. At the end of the day, it was his choice to make.

Mike sighed. "No, I want to tell him. I want to be with Will, like I'm with you," he said, laying his bike down on the ground as he looked at her. "I just…I'm so scared that I'm going to lose him, for good now."

El smiled reassuringly, getting onto her tiptoes and kissing Mike on the nose (he was very tall now, much taller than when they had first met). "You won't. Promise," she said, and before he had time to properly respond, she grabbed his hand and quickly led him to Will's door, giving it a firm knock.

A few seconds later, Will opened the door. He smiled, although El could tell he was tired. There were bags under his eyes. "Hey, El," he said, looking at her and then turning to the boy she was standing next to. "Hi, Mike," he said, and El noticed that his voice raised a few pitches. She wondered if Mike had noticed that too.

"Hi Will," Mike said, smiling back. Warmth seemed to return to Mike's face as his friend once again acknowledged his existence. El

smiled, offering a quick and polite “hello” herself as Will let the two of them inside.

“Um, El, do you mind if I talk to you for a moment?” Will asked her as he closed the door behind them. He glanced over at Mike, whose expression had dimmed a little bit. “It’ll only be for a minute, promise. You can wait in the living room, yeah?”

Mike nodded as Will grabbed El’s hand, leading her away to his room. El furrowed her brow as he closed the door behind them and whirled on her.

“Well? Did you ask him?” he asked her nervously. It took El a few seconds to figure out what he meant, but she quickly understood: she had told him yesterday that she would ask Mike if he had feelings for him. And even though she knew that he did, she hesitated in telling him. Will hadn’t wanted El to tell Mike about his feelings, and she had a feeling that Mike wouldn’t want her to tell him in his place. Of course, she didn’t want to *lie*, but she felt this was something that the two of them needed to talk to themselves about.

“Can’t tell you,” El said softly. “Just tell him how you feel.”

Will’s eyes widened in fear. The same fear and panic she knew Mike was feeling, too. “W-what? El, I can’t do that!” he said, trying to keep his voice at a whisper so that Mike wouldn’t overhear them. “He… he’ll hate me.”

El rolled her eyes. She had heard *that* before. “He won’t, I promise,” she insisted, grabbing his hand and squeezing it. Will sighed, nodding as his nerves practically bubbled on his face. El smiled, letting go and walking out of the room and leading him back to Mike.

Mike was already seated in the middle of the couch, waiting anxiously for their return. After a silent acknowledgement of their return, Mike remained seated as El sat down on one side of him, and Will sat down on the other. El looked over at the two boys: they were nervous wrecks. Mike’s face was red, his eyes looking anywhere but her or Will; Will, on the other hand, was fidgeting with his hands, at times looking like he was going to say something but then silencing himself. What was taking them so long?

El realized that maybe they would have an easier time talking if they were alone. Sighing, she stood up. “I need to go…to the bathroom,” she said haltingly as both of the boys looked at her, wide-eyed and fearful. “I will be back…soon.” With that, she left, walking down the hall and closing the bathroom door behind her.

Admittedly, though, she was still curious to see what would happen. She cared about the both of them; in different ways, perhaps, but she wanted them both to be happy. She needed to make sure that they were happy. Considering whether this was a good and ethical decision for a split second, she grabbed the washcloth on the wrack in the bathroom, wrapping it around her head and covering her eyes.

It didn’t take her long to find them; she knew exactly where they were, after all, and it was only in the other room over. She stood, watching them as the two awkward boys sat on the couch, surrounded in darkness.

They were silent for a beat before Will spoke.

“Mike, El talked to me yesterday…” he started, causing Mike to turn his head towards him. “I-I’m sorry if it feels like I’ve been avoiding you.”

“It’s okay!” Mike said quickly, and El could see how thankful he was that Will had started talking instead. “And, um, just so you know, it’s not like I made El do it. She insisted. You know how she is,” he said, laughing a little bit. Will exhaled through his nose amusedly, smirking. El furrowed her brow. She did *not* know how she was. Maybe she would ask Mike later.

“I was just, uh, worried, that’s all. That I did something wrong, or you were angry at me or something,” Mike added quietly, again looking away from Will. Now Will was looking over at Mike.

“You did nothing wrong! It isn’t your fault, Mike. I was never angry at you. I’m really sorry,” Will said quickly, the fear bubbling visibly to the surface again. Mike seemed to notice this, too, and brought a hand to Will’s back to try to comfort him. Will sighed, running his hand over his face to try to relax. “I’m sorry, Mike. It really isn’t your fault,” he repeated before continuing, “I-I’ve just been dealing with a

lot right now. I'm sorry."

Mike appeared to look hurt, but kept his hand on Will's back. "Will, why didn't you tell me? I've been so worried. I could have helped you."

"I'm so—"

"William Byers, that's your fifth apology and don't you dare apologize to me one more time," Mike said, his tone shifting from consoling to admonishment. El noted that his tone wasn't angry, though, more just gently scolding, and lighthearted enough to make Will smile. The apology was written on his lips. El always knew Will as someone to say sorry for things that were silly or frivolous.

"I just didn't want you to worry," Will sighed. "It's stupid."

El frowned. Thank goodness Mike was there to tell him that wasn't true. "Will, if it's been bothering you, then it definitely isn't stupid," he said, pausing. "It's…it doesn't have to do with the Upside-Down, right?"

Will looked at him. "What? No. Like I said, it's stupid."

"Everything non-Upside-Down-related isn't stupid. I was just making sure that I didn't have to whip out my badass, telekinetic girlfriend to fight some monsters, or something," Mike said with a wink. El smirked. "But seriously, Will, whatever it is, I don't care. I just don't want to lose you again."

Will said nothing, looking away from Mike with a worried expression on his face. El knew he was still afraid to talk to him about this. They were both afraid. El stepped closer to the two of them as they sat in silence. She reached out to the person she was closest to: Mike. Gently touching his shoulder, she tried to channel her energy towards him. Mike glanced towards her, looking away from Will for a moment. She didn't know if he knew she was there, but he could at least feel her presence. She would be there, whenever and for however long he needed. He would never be alone, not as long as she could help it.

“There’s something I need to tell you,” Mike said, his voice shifting lower a couple of octaves. His hand was off of Will’s back now. Will turned to him curiously, and a little wearily. Mike took a deep breath before continuing:

“I like you.”

Will sucked in his breath, startled. “W-w-what do you mean?”

Mike blushed. “I mean, I *like* like you. More than a friend. I’m attracted to you, the same way I am to El. I…” Mike sighed. “I like you.”

Will’s eyes seemed to sparkle as they were filled to the brim with tears. “Mike…”

But Mike wasn’t finished. “Look, I know that it’s really weird, but it’s true. And I’m sorry for dropping it on you with whatever’s going on with you. But I’ve talked with El about it and she told me I should tell you. Although, I mean, it wasn’t just her, because I wanted to tell you too. It’s okay if you, uh, don’t feel the same way, because I get it. It’s really, really fine if you don’t…”

“Mike.”

“…and if you want to keep your distance from me then I, um, I get it, y’know? I understand. It just felt *wrong* not telling you, because I’ve just had these feelings for, like, so long, but I’m really sorry if it’s too much and I totally, totally get it if you want to kick me out right…”

“Mike!”

Mike stopped talking, shutting his mouth. Will had moved a little closer to him, sitting up straight so the two of them were at eye-level with one another. The two of them looked at each other in silence. Then, in one swift motion, Will leaned in, kissing the boy across from him.

El didn’t know whether to watch or give them a bit of privacy. She backed up a little bit from them, but she did look back to look at them. Life was returning to both of their faces as their bodies relaxed, absorbed in the kiss. El didn’t feel a twinge of jealousy that someone

else was kissing her boyfriend. She didn't think she would, but it was nice to get that confirmation. They looked…cute. After they both pulled apart, Mike looked happy. Will looked happy. And El, staring at them, was happy for them.

There was a brief silence between them as the two boys blushed at one another, breathing heavily. Both Will and Mike had large grins on their face.

"Umm, in case you didn't get the memo, I like you too," Will said shyly. Mike laughed.

"Yeah, I think I got that," Mike said, smirking. "Uh, that thing on your mind…was that it?"

Will nodded, his face still flushed. "Yes…I talked to El about it yesterday. So, um, she knows…she actually told me to tell you now, but I guess you beat me to it," he said bashfully as Mike looked at him, pleasantly surprised.

"Well, you told me in your own way," Mike said, grinning.

"Speaking of El…she's been in the bathroom a long time," Will said, furrowing his brow.

Now it was El's turn to blush as Mike smirked. "I think she's spying on us," Mike said, laughing. "I'm pretty sure I felt her tap me on the shoulder to encourage me to tell you."

Embarrassed, El yanked the washcloth she had wrapped around her eyes off, standing up quickly to look at herself in the mirror. She washed the trickle of blood that had dripped from her nose in the bathroom and carefully opened the door to the bathroom, walking outside to find two giggling boys watching her as she walked in. Red in the face, she didn't look at either of them as she sat down on the other side of Mike.

"El?" Mike asked, a little amused as he touched her shoulder. She turned towards him. "Were you using your powers to watch us?"

El blushed furiously. She figured that it wouldn't be a lie if she didn't answer. "Not answering," she said, crossing her arms. This earned

another giggle out of the boys as Mike wrapped an arm around her.

Mike calmed down quicker than Will did. His expression became more serious as he looked over at her. “Are you still sure that this is okay?” he asked her. El rolled her eyes. If anything, everything that just happened only confirmed in her mind that it was.

“*Yes*,” she insisted, grabbing his hand and squeezing it. Mike grinned, giving her a peck on the nose before turning back over to Will.

“Um, so, uh…” Mike started, prefacing what he was about to say with nervous, unintelligible noises. “Will, so, like I said, El, uh, she talked to me too. About…this. And, um, well, I was wondering, and I mean, it’s okay if you say no because it’s fine and we can go back to the way things were, but I, um…” Will watched Mike expectantly as he glanced back at her. “…I still want to date El. But, if you, like, don’t have any problems with that, maybe we could…” Mike blushed as Will grinned at him.

“Go on…” Will said. El knew that like her, he was used to Mike’s ramblings at this point.

Mike sucked in his breath. “Do you want to be my boyfriend?” he asked, way too quickly that El could barely make out what he was trying to say. Will blinked in surprise.

“Were you really second-guessing yourself after I just kissed you? Seriously?” Will said, laughing. Mike blushed and gave him a halfhearted shrug. “Yes! Of course I’ll be your boyfriend!”

Mike immediately breathed out a sigh of relief, before leaning in to kiss Will on the lips, this time taking the smaller boy off guard. El grinned. Finally, her hard work had paid off. The two boys were bright red like raspberries as they looked back at her.

“Uh, sorry,” Mike said to her, embarrassed.

“It’s okay,” she insisted, regarding the two boys. She hadn’t been able to observe many relationships since she had come back for good, but she was able to tell that the two of them had it bad. “Happy?” she asked both of them.

They both smiled, relieved, and nodded.

“Good,” she said, turning her head a bit to look at Will. “…want to play Atari?” she asked with a sly smile. Will grinned, nodding as he got up to set up the console system, dragging the two controllers over, one for her and one for himself.

As the two of them played Space Invaders, El felt Mike wrap an arm around her waist. Glancing over at Will, who was seated on the other side of her boyfriend, she thought she saw an arm around Will as well. Smiling to herself, she turned back to the game. For the first time in a while, everything felt…right.

Author's Note:

> Hope you all liked this! I'm planning on writing more one-shots like these, but it takes me forever to actually finish anything so just a fair warning. I keep on going back and forth between Mileven and Byeler because they both can be written so well and are so cute together, so I figured I would try my hand on a scenario where both happen. I realize that El might be a little out of character in this, because in reality I can imagine her being pretty jealous if this happened, but I enjoyed writing her. Hopefully this turned out okay. Let me know if you enjoyed this story and if you'd like to keep seeing me write :)